

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)



Public Hearing
on
Teacher and Principal Retention

Testimony of
Dr. Melissa Kim
Deputy Chancellor of DC Public Schools

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Dr. Melissa Kim, Deputy Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).

I am eager for the opportunity to speak with you today about the work that DCPS has done under the leadership of Mayor Muriel Bowser to build the strongest educator workforce of principals and teachers in the country—and to address your questions—and solicit your insights—on how to do this important work even better.

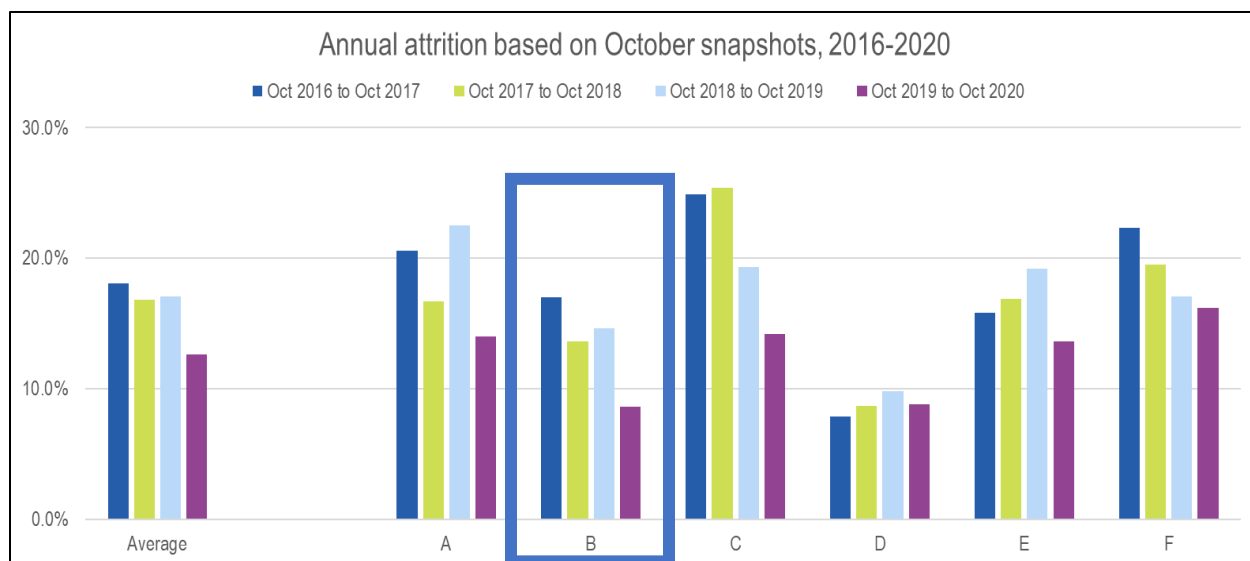
First, let me begin today by acknowledging the incredible school leaders, educators, and support staff who, in the wake of COVID-19 and the unprecedented trauma of the pandemic on our communities, have been essential to ensuring that we continue to provide a world-class education for our students each and every day.

DCPS' core strategy for ensuring the very best education for our children begins and ends with the recruitment, selection, development, and retention of the most talented educators in the country! A little more than a decade ago, DCPS was one of the lowest performing districts in the U.S. with falling enrollment, high teacher and principal turnover, and low student achievement.

Today, the Bowser Administration has reversed these trends by engaging our leaders, educators, and the leading voices in the research to make sustainable, systemic change for retaining our educators. Our educators requested (1) competitive compensation (2) robust curricula and assessment so that they have the resources to plan quality learning experiences for students (3) accelerated learning and development opportunities to continue to grow and master their craft, and (4) time to engage collaboratively with their colleagues. As you will hear in my testimony, we have worked diligently to meet each of these requests through proven, researched-based approaches. Our results confirm that our strategies are working.

While we have more work to do, DCPS is proud to celebrate the impressive gains we have made in teacher and principal retention over the last decade. Our teacher retention is up nearly 9 percentage points, from 77.8% in school year (SY) 2009-2010 to 86.3% in SY2020-21. As we consider DCPS within the national landscape, we are even more proud of our retention work.

In their annual report, the State Board of Education cited the recent Educational Resource Strategies, Inc. (ERS) study of six large, urban school districts, which showed an average annual attrition rate of 17%. DCPS was in fact one of the six districts in this study and had the second lowest teacher attrition rate (13.5%) of the six districts, both before and during COVID. (Educational Resource Strategies, Inc., 2021).



Source: Educational Resource Strategies, Inc., 2021: <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4773-teacher-turnover-paper.pdf>.

These successful results apply to our school leader metrics as well. Consider that over the last three school years, DCPS has retained, on average, 96% of Highly Effective and Effective principals. Additionally, in our commitment to supporting and growing our leaders of color, our data show that we have retained principals of color at a slightly higher rate than white principals.

Key Strategies to Support and Retain Teachers

Today I will highlight the five research-based strategic investments we are making district-wide in service of developing and retaining talented educators within DCPS.

The first is robust professional development. DCPS is committed to ensuring meaningful opportunities for growth and development. Through *Learning Together to Advance our Practice* (LEAP) seminars, teachers have opportunities to come together in shared learning through weekly content-specific professional development learning communities at every school. LEAP seminars are led by assistant principals and instructional coaches, and we're proud to report that 247 teachers currently lead LEAP seminars. During LEAP sessions, educators focus on content-specific learning such as critical phonics concepts aligned to the science of reading and how to use positive and affirming language to deepen relationships with students.

Second, we are investing in talent development and pipelines. We know that educators are more likely to stay if they have a deep connection to the community, so we are prioritizing strengthening our local pipeline. Notably, we have a partnership with American University that will give DC high school graduates a full scholarship if they commit to teaching in a DCPS school for five years. We are thrilled that Ballou High School's SY2020-21 valedictorian Riley Campbell is in the first cohort. We are also investing in additional development opportunities including our Teacher Leadership Innovation Program, which empowers teachers with flexible schedules to spend part of the day teaching and part of the day leading other adults in the building.

Third, we have a targeted focus on recruiting and retaining diverse talent. The research is clear that teachers who share a similar identity as their students can make a profound additional impact on student achievement. DCPS is seeing strong retention rates for our teachers of color, as the average retention rate over the past two years was over 88% for Black and Latino teachers. Recognizing that our 20 percent of our student population now identifies as Hispanic/Latino, DCPS is committed to increasing the number of Hispanic/Latino educators across DCPS by strategically targeting recruitment through diverse job boards and recruitment fairs geared toward Hispanic/Latino and bilingual candidates and ensuring our recruitment resources are language inclusive.

Fourth, we are committed to celebrating our top talent. DCPS attracts and retains the best teachers in the nation. Through IMPACT, we provide continuous feedback to both celebrate our highest performing school-based staff and provide opportunities for ongoing growth and development in addition to performance bonuses. DCPS celebrates highly effective teachers with bonuses of up to \$25,000 per year, in addition to having one of the highest baseline salary scales in the country. Overall, retention at DCPS has improved since the start of IMPACT in 2009. DCPS also remains committed to our multiyear review of IMPACT and we have already begun making evolutions to IMPACT aimed at improving how IMPACT supports teacher growth and retention.

The stress of COVID, as well as the stress of being a helping professional during COVID, has taken a toll on the workforce. To strengthen morale and connect as a DCPS community, school leaders, mental health teams, and other invested staff and partners have found ways to engage in stress-reducing activities to strengthen connection and bolster stamina for the work of educating students. Many of our school leaders are partnering with local non-profits, such as Restorative DC, to provide staff with a full day of therapeutic wellness activities including yoga and cooking. As a district we aim to create the time and space for students and staff to have a sense of joy in belonging to their school community.

At the same time, DCPS recognizes we can and must do more to support educators. I'm proud to share more about a 5th targeted strategy specifically aimed at schools serving greater concentrations of students farthest from opportunity.

DCPS was recently awarded a nearly \$30 million grant, over the course of three years, from the U.S. Department of Education to provide strategic support to 1- and 2-STAR schools to recruit talented educators, provide equity-centered professional development, create robust support for new teachers, and grant new performance-based incentive awards. Specifically, classroom teachers who commit to teaching in a high-need content area at a RISE (*Rigorous Instruction Supports Equity*) school, are eligible for a signing bonus, and RISE extends performance-based bonuses to include teachers and school leaders with effective ratings who are retained at RISE schools and have a proven track record of success at DCPS. Through RISE, DCPS will also pay all component and renewals fees for teachers to receive their National Board Certification, among other personalized career development opportunities.

Key Strategies to Support and Retain Principals

Of course, we know—and the research confirms—that having and retaining strong principals is a key lever for accelerating student achievement and retaining our best educators. Serving as a principal is very demanding. In many districts around the country—especially urban districts—it has become exceedingly difficult to retain school leaders due to the pressures of the role.

However, DCPS is making strong headway in this area. We asked our principals what they needed to be successful in this work and they outlined the need for (1) competitive compensation and increased contractual commitment from the district (2) one-on-one coaching and support from their superintendents (3) direct support from central office teams (4) differentiated learning opportunities to learn and grow their craft and (5) additional mentors and learning communities for targeted needs.

DCPS has responded to provide better supports in all five areas.

(1) We know that stability in school leadership matters. Last year, DCPS increased its contractual commitment to principals from 1 to 2-year appointments, while offering performance-based compensation on top of nationally competitive base salaries.

(2) DCPS employs ten Instructional Superintendents to provide targeted support to our principals and schools.

(3) To provide our leaders with support at their schools, we have created the cluster support model, which consists of Central Services team members that provide professional learning and direct services to schools, including coaching teachers in the DCPS curricula and instruction; best practices in special education and inclusion; operations support and creating effective data systems. This year alone, CST members have provided over 4,200 coaching touchpoints with schools.

(4) To ensure our leaders are developed in the newest researched-based practices, we convene multiple learning seminars throughout the year, including Summer Leadership Institute, four Leadership Academies, and in 2021, we hosted our first Latinx Leadership Summit to target professional learning opportunities for our Latino leaders.

(5) Finally, we know that we need additional support for targeted learning. In this spirit, we have engaged the School Club Mentors Group, which is comprised of former DCPS and school district leaders who bring a wealth of knowledge to the work to serve as mentors to our current leaders. We also utilize our Leadership Induction Program with Georgetown University to train current school leaders and assistant principals in innovative leadership practice.

These investments have yielded strong results!

DCPS' principal retention has significantly improved over the last five years, and year-to-year retention remains consistent in the 90% range over the past three years. Additionally, the number of DCPS schools with one principal with a tenure of over five years has doubled since SY2014-15, now accounting for over 44% of DCPS schools.

It goes without saying that steady leadership is critical to sustained gains. A key example of this can be found in our redesigned Ward 8 Anacostia and Ballou high schools. Principal Haith is now in his 4th year of work at Anacostia and the teacher retention rate has increased 24 percentage points since 2018! Principal Jackson, also in his 4th year at Ballou, has steadied the work there and, since 2018, the teacher retention rate has increased by 26 percentage points. We have already seen dynamic results in this work, with 9th grade academy pass rates hitting an all-time high in first term for Anacostia (71%) and Ballou (81%). Additionally, both schools made strong gains in graduation rates this year—Anacostia is up twelve percent (74%), and Ballou is up eight percent (70%).

Many districts around the country have made difficult cuts to professional development, technology, and compensation during this challenging time. Mayor Bowser and Chancellor Ferebee have remained resolute in the commitments to our families and educators, and we thank the DC Council for its partnership in that effort. With an infusion of millions of dollars in technology for our students, accelerated summer learning academies, robust virtual curricula, social-emotional supports for our students, and the continued investments in our educators and leaders, DCPS is rebuilding from the pandemic, stronger than before. While we have more work to do, we are proud of the steps we have taken to build a diverse, talented workforce.

I want to close by recognizing the contribution of every school staff member who has been working around the clock to ensure our students have safe and joyful learning experiences during a challenging school year like no other. It is because of our committed educators that DCPS schools are fully open—once again—providing our students and communities access to joyful, rigorous, and accelerated learning opportunities. We know that our wonderful people power this work, and this would not have been possible without them.

I'm happy to take any questions you have at this time.